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ABSTRACT

Communication has played an important role in the dramatic transformation of the rural social system in the People's Republic of China since 1949. Mass media in China in the first two decades of communist rule were underdeveloped when compared with that of the Western world. Interpersonal communication, on the contrary, has been proved to be one of the most effective means of communication in the socialist rural development program. The print medium, particularly official newspapers like the "People's Daily," on the other hand, has also demonstrated its leading role in shaping and promoting the rural development policy. With the advance of the new modernization program, it is expected that China will make fuller use of its emerging mass media technology imported from the Western world in the transformation of its rural development program. (Author/TJ)

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RURAL DEVELOPMENT AND COMMUNICATION IN THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA : A REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

Since 1949, rural development in the People's Republic of China has undergone tremendous changes. The development of the Mutual Aid Team to the Agricultural Producer's Cooperatives and finally to the People's Communes has created great impact on the collectivization of agricultur products in China. Under the socialist ideology, China in the 20th century has accomplished her goal in transforming the rural social system.

Communication, on the other hand, has also played an impotrant role in such dramatic transformation of rural social system. Mass media in China in the first two decades of communist rule were underdeveloped when compared with that of the western world. Interpersonal communication, on the contrary, has been proved to be one of the most effective means of communication in the socialist rural development program, either at vertical or horizontal level. The print medium, particularly official newspaper like the People's Daily, on the other hand, has also demonstrated its leading role in shaping and promoting the rural development policy.

With the advance of the new modernization program, it is expected that China will make fuller use of her emerging mass media technology imported from the western world in the future technical transformation of her rural development program.

RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Rural China, since the communist take-over in 1949, has gone through a series of vigorous institutional changes which have also profoundly affected China's whole agrarian set up. Such changes like the Land Reform in the early fifties and the configuration of the cooperatives into communes in the early sixties, have changed rural China radically from what it was in the pre-liberation period before 1948.[1]

After his establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949, Mao Tse-tung realized that an agrarian reform was inevitable if he wanted to convert China into a modern society. He stipulated such view at the People's Political Consultative Conference on September 29, 1949 that :

> "In all areas where agrarian reform has been thoroughly implemented .....it shall be the central task of the People's Government to organize the peasants and all manpower available for agriculture, for the development of agricultural production and side occupation."[2]

The two principles adopted by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) on land reform were the "abolition of the private property"[3] and "nationalization of land as a basic principle of the Party's agrarian program."[4] However, the prime principle of the Land Reform in the early fifties was "to confiscate the lands of the landlord class and to redistribute it to peasants having insufficient or no land."[5] The communist government also believed that such land reform would release certain 'productive forces' that could contribute to rapid mechanization of the rural area via increased agricultural productions. The essence of land

reform in the People's Republic of China, as manifested from above, was to transfer land ownership and to increase agricultural production through technical transformation. In order to achieve such goals, the communist regime has implemented several rural development programs in its first twenty years of reign.

The Land Reform[6] of 1950-52 redistributed 46 million hectares of land among 300 million poor and landless peasants who contributed about 70 percent of the nation's agricultural population. During the first two years of the First Five Year Plan (1953-57) the target for cotton, silk, tea, jute, oil crops and livestocks had not been fulfilled nor did the land reform program succeeded to increase agricultural production as farmers were faced with shortage of draught animals, farm tools, fertilizers and even seeds.[7] The redistribution of land has created too many independent farmlands but with little farming resources to support them.

However, one striking feature of the land reform program in the early fifties was the estiblishment of the Peasant's Association by the Government Administration Council on July 14, 1950. Such association were mass organizations formed on a voluntary basis and designed as the legal executive organization for reforming the agrarian system.[8] Their major functions were:

(1) to unite farm labors, poor peasants, middle peasants, and all anti-feudal elements in the rural areas, so as to carry out social reform step by step;

(2) to protect the interest of the peasants in accordance with

the policy, laws, and decrees of the people's government;

(3) to organize the peasants for production to set up rural cooperatives, to develop agriculture and subsidiary occupations, and to improve the living standard of the peasants;

(4) to safeguard the political rights of the peasants, to raise their political and cultural level, and to take part in the construction of a state of people's democracy.[9]

The Peasant's Association also executed all measures of land reform and provided a nucleus of peasantry who had to be educated to meet the responsibilities of executing the agrarian reform laws. Such peasants' association were formed in each village, county and province.

Membership in the peasants' association was open to agricultural laborers, poor peasants, middle peasants, rural handcraftmen, and the impoverished intellectuals in the rural area.[10] Membership of the peasants' association increased from 50 million to 88 million in its second year of implementation. Such membership comprised about 30 percent of the rural population in a locality and might be as high as 50 percent in some places.

In 1952, Lio Lu-yen, then Deputy Secretary-General of the People's Republic of China, proclaimed the "victorious completion of land reform in China"[11] after almost two years since the promulgation of the Agrarian Reform Law. Over 90 percent of the rural population were reported to have achieved the movement, with only 30 million rural people yet to complete it in either the winter of 1952 or the spring of 1953.[12]

The overall progress of the movement seemed to be pretty impressive in terms of success, however, certain areas were moving far ahead while others lagging behind. The following table provides an aggregate data for the progress of land reform in China in terms of rural population involved.

Table 1 about here

In some ways, the Land Reform in China had created as many problems as it had resolved. It is difficult for such a land reform in a country with an adverse land-labor ratio.[13] The lack of institutional stability in China was manifested in the "Class Disintegeration" in the aftermath of land reform. However, it provided an impetus for institutional transformation of agriculture in the later stages of rural development.

The destination of the institutional transformation, sparked by the land reform, was known to all in China. The Chinese Communist Party, on the other hand, in introducing a socialist type of land reform had manifested the inevitable eventuality of agricultural collectivization, but on the other hand, the Agrarian Reform Law (ARL) did not contain long-term measures for adjusting to changes arising from inheritance or marriage and this led to further chaos in the later stages of the land redistribution. To the Chinese Communist Party, Chinese agriculture was stagnant and depressed primarily because its institutional framework was 'feudalistic'. In Marxian terms, the 'production relations' had

impeded the development of the 'production forces'[14]. Such contradiction should have been resolved before agricultural development could take place, and this would mean the substitution of new production relations embedded in the 'fedual' agrarian structure. Furthermore, the early land reform program had left an institutional vacuum, which had to be filled by new production relations based on socialist organization of production. The Chinese government therefore encouraged the peasants to form Mutual Aid Team(MAT) on the basis of traditional patterns of agricultural cooperation. The means of production within a MAT, however, remainded privately owned. Each peasant household was free to dispose of its own produce. On the other hand, the Chinese government also encouraged the peasants to form Agricultural Producers' Cooperatives (APC) on the basis of successful MATs. The APCs were three or four times larger than the MATs and were also more elaborated in organization, based on the principle of 'central management but private ownership'.[15]

The institutional transformation of agriculture in China continued in 1956 with the development of advanced APCs which were ten times larger than the MATs by average number of household. They were formed by amalgamating the smaller APCs existing in the village.

Table 2 about here

The peasants income under such advanced cooperative was

different from provate own farms. Income was distrubuted among the members under the 'labor day' work payment scheme. A labor day represented the time and amount of labor an individual spent completing the norm set for each kind of work and for attaining certain standards required for each kind of work, including the technical standard, and arduousness of labor process. In addition to distributing income, the advanced cooperatives implemented an agricultural tax system that annually delivered about 10 percent of the total farm product to the Chinese Communist government.[16]

However, rural development in China experienced a great change in the sixties. APCs were all converted into communes. The organization of the communes generally consisted of three levels: the communes as a whole, the production brigade, and the production team. Most of the larger communes had production brigades and production teams. At the end of 1960, there were 24,000 communes, 500,000 production brigades and 3 million production teams.[17] The communes was basically designed to be ' a transitional form of organizaiton from collective ownership to state ownership' or 'a form of organization for building up socialism and gradually passing on toward communism'.[18]

Disappointment over the small increase in agricultural output in 1961, together with popular discontent, made it necessary for the communist government to downgrade the production brigades and to upgrade the production teams in the latter part of the

year.[19] The People's Daily, meanwhile also urged the people to take active part in agricultural recovery. In its New Year edition on January 1, 1962, the People's Daily claimed that "production activism" of the masses was the major measure for agricultural recovery and a new policy on agrarian development was later proposed.[20] Mass media was therefore introduced into the scene of rural development by the Chinese government.

In June 1964, Mao Tse-tung issued the "Directive Listing Six Criteria for Evaluating the Success or Failure of the Rural Socialist Education Movement" to strengthen his earlier promugation of the major guideline for the rural socialist education movement which emphasized (1) the establishment of the party to supervise the work of the basic-level cadres, and (2) the systematization of cadres participation in farm labor to guarentee sound direction of production and to prevent alienating the cadres from the masses.[21] This was further supplemented by the adoption of the 'Organization Rules of Poor and Lower-middle Peasants' Association'. Beginning in the late 1964, poor and lower-middle peasants' associations were organized by the communist party authorities of many provinces and municipalities.[22]

Such change in the institutionalization of the rural development didn't show much progress in the mid-sixties that another policy document, 'Some Problems Currently Arising in the Course of the Rural Socialist Education Movement', reportedly worked out

by Mao Tse-tung, was adopted on January 14, 1965 by the National Working Conference convened by the Central Political Bureau.[23] Mao also stated in that document" the main target of the present movement is those party person in power taking the capitalist road."[24] Political struggle was brought into the later phase of the rural development program via media - The People's Daily - when Mao finally launched the Great Prolatarian Cultural Revolution in early 1966. This campaign completely overshowed the Rural Socialist Education Movement and brought turmoil to the entire nation.[25]

Agricultural productivity in China was considered to be of little success by the end of the sixties in terms of its technical and institutional transformation with reference to Western development standard. Nevertheless, throughtout the agricultural development in the forst two decades of communist leadership, a certain communication strategy did emerge in reinforcing the implementation of the various rural development programs.

Farming condition in China have improved considerably in the late seventies. The irrigated area is three times as large as the early post-liberation period and equals half the total area of cultivated land. Tractor is now employed on one-third of the farmland. Nevertheless, China admitted that her agricultural production is still lagging behind the world's level in many apsects.[26] It is time for China to catch up with the more advanced

nations in agricultural development. The Ten Year Plan 1976-1985 set by the Development of the National Economy noted that by 1985, China will produce 400 million tons of grains, and by the end of the century, China will probably produce 650 to 750 million tons of grains. The goals for farm modernization are that total value of farm output will increase 4-5% annually in 1978-85, at least 85% of all major farm processes will be mechanized. In order to achieve such ambitious goals, the Chinese government depends heavily on western technology which includes both modern management methods and mechanism. New breed of grains were tested as well as improved ferterlizers. Researchers were sent to industralized agricultural nations to acquire the new know-how of improving agrarian products. On the other hand, at the 3rd National Conference on Farm Mechanization held in Peking in January, 1978 the Chinese government has set 1980 as the year for 70% of farm mechanization. However, this target is not easy to reach since China has a shortage of rolled steel[27] as well as a problem in standardization of farm machines. There are so many models made with different specifications that spare parts are not interchangable and difficult to find.[28]

The other step the communist government will do in the future agricultural development program is to increase investment in the agricultural portion of the total investment for the national economy. This will be done by helping peasants in mountainous

areas as well as those in areas inhabitated by minority nationalities. More credit will be given to the communes for farm mechanization. On the other hand, special agricultural tax plan is also passed. The peasants are given a certain quota of grain which they have to sell to local authorities. However, the peasants may reserve the surplus for their own use or sell it at a higher price set by the state. In case of natural disaster, the state will decrease or exampt them from their agricultural tax and purchasing quota.[29]

In terms of agricultural research as a support to the development program, China recently has set agricultural science research organizations at all levels. Disease and insect forecast stations are incorporated in most people's communes. Small groups on plant protection are also formed in production brigades. Certain members in every production team are chosen as plant protector in the execution of day to day operation. The structure of such plant protection network is three-fold - with the county's station as the center, the commune's forecast group as the backbone and the plant protectors in the brigades and teams as the base. Over 7,300 people are now engaged in such operation.[30]

With the modernization of agriculture and industry in mind, China has turned her large-scale agriculture toward more scientific farming. Besides using more advanced tools like tractors and automatic sprinklers, Chinese peasants also learn field

management. 40,000 commune members have so far been trained as agricultural technicians to guide field management.[31] As a result of such careful management, the country wide grain yield has increased an average of 6 percent a year.[32]

COMMUNICATION IN RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Like other economic activities, agricultural development in the People's Republic of China is completely controlled by the government, and in turn, by the communist party. Communication in the process of rural development is by no exception also controlled by the government too. Agricultural extension, besides other means of communication, was one that had great effect on the process of technical transformation of agricultural development in China.[33]

Prior to the take-over of the communist government, the earliest agriclutural extension work in China was done in the 1910s by a few private missionary and educational institutions such as the University of Nanking. Agricultural extension service in the People's Republic of China did not begin until 1951 when the first few agricultural techique extension stations were poorly organized and equipped. Most of the extension workers were party cadres with low technical knowledge. In 1954, only

about 10 percent of the 600,000 APCs and mutual-aid teams were served by such station.[34]

In order to beef up the agricultural extension system, the Ministry of Agriculture issued a directive in 1955 urging all provinces, special districts and counties to set up agricultural technique stations. The functions of such stations were:

(1) to coordinate the production experience of local peasants;
(2) to propagate modern agricultural science and technology;
(3) to help peasants increase their production and income;
(4) to promote agricultural cooperativization, and
(5) to assist local party leaders in improving agricultural techniques and management.

The location of such stations, according to the directive, should be in the village and rural areas with better foundation for cooperativization and better natural condidtions. However, political background of the personnel was most important. They should possess strong political training and be of a secondary agricultural school graduate level.[35]

The total number of such extension stations proliferated in 1957 to 13,669.[36] Even with such vast number of extension stations, agricultural technique transformation didn't improve as desired. The low literacy rate of the peasants and the apathy of the cadres create a lot of problems in the implementation of new programs. As a result of such inefficiency, the Ministry of

Agriculture issued another directive in 1962 instructing the stations to make concrete improvements in administration and personnel.[37] Interpersonal communication among the stations and peasants was therefore intensified through demonstration and further fostered by propaganda via print media rather than using the tradition cocerion like small group meeting every evening after work. The improvement of literacy rate in the villages helps to enhance the effectiveness of print media distriubuted to the peasants.

Such extension stations were also told to take local condition into consideration when choosing their communication strategy. The communication approach adopted by the Chinese government at the state level was similiar to the western agricultural extension model in which everything comes from the government. This top-down model is utilized because most local peasants lack the necessary agricultural background for innovation, of course with the exception of a few more progressive farmers.

Fig.1 about here

Agricultural research at both national and provincial level was established under the direction of the Ministry of Agriclture and Foresty. At the national level, bureaus of agriclture were incorporated at both Nanking and Shanghai with

experiment stations, field station and laboratories. At the provincial level, there was a great array of agriculture research institutes, agricultural experiment stations, seed-and-animals multiplication stations, demonstration farms and other farms institutions for agricultural improvement.[38] The demonstration farms which vary in size, were described as bridges between experimentation and extension. They were designed basically to supplement the extension stations and research bases.[39]

However, many Chinese scientists doubted the wisdom of their participation in the demonstration farm work and maintain that research and experimentation should be conducted in the laboratories. Such view, nevertheless, was regarded as bourgeois attitude by the government, and was not permitted in a socialist rural development program.

In terms of dissemination of agricultural knowledge, provinces, municipalities, and autonomous regions have been urged to compile and publish local experiences on agricultural publications, to hold agricultural exhibitions and to arrange for exchange of information between communes. A National Agricultural Exhibition Center was constructed on the eastern outskirt of Peking, including five pavilions dealing with agricultural products in general, rural sideline occupations and agricultural mechanization. On the other hand, radio was also used by the government to

disseminate agricultural knowledge besides the usual political propaganda and mass indoctrination in the country side. Such radio diffusion network under the provision of the National Program for Agricultural Development (NPAD) was to be extended to virtually all rural areas and the majority of the communes were to be able to receive such radio programs. However, with the shortage of electric power and communication facilities as well as because of the vast mountainous areas in rural China, such radio broadcasting system was developed with emphasis on wired broadcasting system. In contrast to the conventional broadcasting systems, such wired broadcasting system has no tunable radio receivers at its termination point, thus requiring the audience to listen via an installed loudspeaker to whatever is broadcasted by the central station.[40] Such wired system has the advantages of simplicity in maintenance and is less expensive than the wireless. In spite of these advantages, the People's Daily commented on the disadvantages of such system:

> "In a number of communes and production brigades there is nobody to repair the loudspeaker or the wired broadcasting station when they go wrong. People sometimes have to walk for two or three days on mountainous roads to the centers of the county to get repairs done. Moreover, the sound is weak in some places when rain is falling." 41

It was not until late 1974 that an 'overwhelming majority' of communes had amplifier system, more than 90 percent of the production brigades and production teams had installed loud-

speaker system, and 63 percent of rural household in the country had loudspeakers.[42] Although the development of wired broadcasting in China's rural area has been considerably rapid, the country can produce only simple loudspeakers in great numbers and will not, for some time, be able to produce radios in similiar quantities. Eventhough transistors were available in as early as 1963, the peasants in the rural areas were too poor that they couldn't afford to purchase them, even if such transistors were offered at very low prices.[43] China, nevertheless, was unable to utilize television in its rural development programs due to the relatively high price in program productions and the peasants' inability to purchase such television receivers.[44] However, such situtation changes in early 1979 when China normalizes her diplomatic relationship with the United States. Visitors to Mainland China are now allowed to bring color TV sets to their relatives or friends upon payment of applicable custom duties. Foreign manufactures are also granted the privilege to establish maintenance centers in Canton.

In spite of such tremendous changes in policy, China, with her backwardness in mass media development and unlike other countries "who have put their hopes (and budgets) into new communication technology"[45], has depended basically on interpersonal communication in its rural development; face-to-face talk, discussion groups, and meetings are typical forms of

interpersonal communication. Chu (1974) pointed out that communication was also utilized on a massive scale during the rural land reform movement.[46] Both media and interpersonal channels were employed to convince the peasants that action against the landlords would be necessary. On the other hand, during the later stages of rural development program, peasants in the communes were pressured through different communication channels to compete against each other in group contests for higher productivity.

The cadres who were trained by the communist party also played an important communication role in the process of rural development. Such cadres were selected from families with 'clear backgrounds' which usually means family of working class and has high political ideology that is in line with the cental government; he must be a member of the communist party to be qualified for such appointment. Such cadres were politicized, obedient, and usually resourceful. They carried communication both up and down, to and from top leadership, and also horizontally into the villages' neighborhood, communes or factories. The feedback brought by these cadres helps to monitor the pace of local development in APCs and later in the communes.

The other communication strategy employed by the communist government in promoting rural reform was the publication of cases of success, the typical one being the "Learn From Tachai"

movement. Tachai is situated in the seriously eroded Taihang Mountains in Shansi Province. The area is cut by seven ravines and dozens of gullies. These ravines and gullies are dry most of the time, but in the rainy season raging torrents used to bite into the hillsides and damage farmland on the slopes.[47] In spite of such adversities, the peasants at Tachai successfully turned the land into a productive area and living standard of that area were reported to have increased considerably.[48] In December 1960 at the Third National Congress, Chou En-lai called upon the entire nation to learn from Tachai; and shortly afterward, the slogan of "In agriculture, learn from Tachai" was put forth by Mao Tse-tung through the media.

Through the use of interpersonal and limited mediated communication channels, the Chinese Communist government was able to achieve rural development and changed the social structure with tangible results in the early seventies. The communication system employed by the Chinese government may not be comparable to western advanced nations but it serves its purpose in the socialist rural development in the fifties, sixties and even in the seventies. China in the seventies is still a media-poor nation in terms of its ownership of radio and television stations and receivers. She has to depend a lot on the print media like the People's Daily, Peking Review, China Reconstructs etc., as the major sources of agricultural knowledge transformation in

an informal sense. It will probably take China five to ten years before she can catch up those western media-rich nations and make fully use of the mass media in her development programs.

Table 3 and 4 about here

Greater Amini-strative Areas	A* (Thousands)	(%)	B* (thousands)	(%)	C (thousands)
North	60,000	100	-------	--	60,000
Northeasr	33,000	100	-------	--	33,000
Northwest	1,800	7	24,500	85	29,000
East	45,000	34	122,500	93	132,000
Central-South	17,000	12	117,000	81	144,000
Southwest	-----	--	73,000	81	90,000
All China	156,800	32	430,000	88	488,000

Table 1 Progress of Land Reform in China In Terms of Rural Population Involved

Sources: Chieh-feng jih pao, July 1, 1952, p.4; Jen-min jih-pao July 5, 1952, p.2; People's Handbook, 1952, pp. 37-38; Honan ji-pao, July 4, 1951, p.3

*A - Before Spring 1950
B - Winter 1950 - Summer 1951
C - Total rural population

	1950	1951	1952	1953	1954	1955	1955	1956
	(Average number of households)							
Agricultural Producers' Cooperatives								
Advanced	32.0	30.0	184.0	137.0	58.0	75.8	246.4	
Elementary	10.4	12.3	15.7	18.1	20.0	26.7	51.1	
Mutual Aid Team								
Temporary	4.2	4.5	5.4	5.7	6.2	6.9	b*	
Permanent	4.2[a]	4.5[a]	6.5	7.3	8.1	10.4	b*	

Table 2 Number of Households in APC and MAT from 1950-56

Source: John Wong, Land Reform in PRC, 1973, p.199

*a - for 1950 and 1951 no distiction was made in the statistics between temporary and permanent MATs
b - MATs had been transformed into APCs

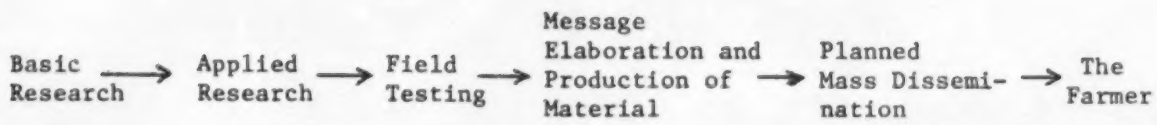

Fig.1 The Western Agricultural Extension Model

	Number of Radio Receiving Set (thousands)	Number of Receiver (Per thousand)
1950	1,000	2
1956	1,500	2
1959	7,000	10
1963	8,000	12

	Number of Television Reciever (thousands)	Number of Television Set (Per thousand)
1960	10	0.02
1961	20	0.03
1962	50	0.07
1964	100	0.14
1965	100	Not Available

Table 3 Radio and Television in China
Source: UNESCO Statistical Yearbooks

*In 1961, China has only 1 transmitter, but in 1963, the number of radio transmitters increased to 450 with 42.5 kW Television broadcasts start in 1958 in China.

Year	Stations	Loudspeakers	Number of Speakers Per Station
1949	8	500	62.5
1950	51	2,200	43.1
1951	183	6,100	33.4
1952	327	16,200	49.5
1953	541	31,800	58.7
1954	577	47,500	82.3
1955	835	90,500	108.3
1956	1,490	515,700	346.1
1957	1,700	993,200	584.2
1958	6,772	2,987,500	441.1
1959	11,124	4,570,000	411.7
1960-63		NOT AVAILABLE	
1964	1,975	6,000,000	3,037.9

Table 4 Number of Rural Wired Broadcasting Stations and Loudspeakers in China, 1949-64

Sources: The Ten Great Years (Peking, 1960); Communist China Digest, No.20, July 26, 1960, p.56; Jen-min Jih-pao November 21, 1964.

FOOTNOTES

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